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An increase in suburb-to-suburb commuting has kept drivers in a constant fight with traffic on the Route 60 bridge over the Tri-State Tollway near Lake Forest.

Now, a major construction project designed to make their lives easier might prompt those same commuters to map alternative ways to traverse the area for the next year.

Work on the reconstruction and widening of the Route 60 bridge should start in the middle of next month, ending in December 2008. Details about the \$18.5 million project were revealed Monday at a news conference hosted by Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park.

Considered one of the worst interchanges in northern Illinois, the east-west Route 60 bridge over the tollway has two through lanes and a left-turn lane in each direction. About 36,000 vehicles cross the bridge daily.

When finished, the bridge will be expanded to three through lanes and two left-turn lanes each way, said Clarita Lao, program development engineer for the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Kirk, who helped to secure \$9 million in federal funding for the project, said the Route 60 construction pain will lead to great relief for drivers as suburb-to-suburb commuting continues to rise.

"Anyone who has been caught on Route 60 after 3:30 p.m. on a weekday knows that you might as well get a hotel room instead of fighting the traffic," Kirk said.

Thousands of workers travel to the area on both sides of the Route 60 bridge. Trustmark Cos.

and Brunswick Corp. are among the significant employers in Lake Forest's Conway Park to the east, with W.W. Grainger Inc. and CDW Corp. on the west.

In addition, HSBC-North America plans to open a new office with 2,400 employees just west of Route 60 and the tollway in February. Two hotels near the interchange are in the works.

Phil Lippert, a Grainger executive and president of Deerfield-based Transportation Management Association of Lake-Cook, said businesses have floated ideas on how to make the construction easier for workers to endure.

"We've talked about flex scheduling, maybe people working four days instead of five," Lippert said.

Construction will begin on the Route 60 bridge's north side. A through lane and a left-turn lane will be kept open in each direction, as well as the ramps to the north- and southbound tollway.

"It'll be painstaking," Lao said, "but the final result will benefit everyone."

She said the project likely will lead to traffic diverting to Riverwoods Road and St. Mary's Road. Those two streets hook into routes 22 and 176, both major east-west thoroughfares.